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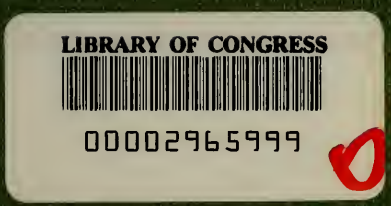

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ELEGY IN AUTUMN

IN MEMORY OF

Frank Dempster Sherman

BY

Clinton Scollard

NEW YORK
Frederic Fairchild Sherman
MCMXVII

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ELEGY IN AUTUMN

I

Brother in song, you who have gone before
Along far incommunicable ways,
Leaving me here upon this mortal shore,
A bondman to the tyrant nights and days,
Across the distance, hail!
Though Time may sever, and we meet no more,
Yet what shall Time avail!

II

'Twas Autumn when we first set hand to hand,
And eye to eye, in loyal comradeship;
Drowsed with a draught of Beauty seemed the land,
As it had raised a golden cup to lip;
But you embodied Spring,
Its harvest hopes, its deeds in joyance planned,
Its brave adventuring.

III

I can recall your buoyance,—can recall
The star-sown hours beneath the Cambridge trees,
When o'er us wheeled the bright processional
Of bold Orion and the Pleiades,
And how we strolled along
Laughterful, and oblivious to all
Save the sweet thrall of Song.

IV

Youth has its visions and its fervors; yours
Were lovingly enlinked with Poesy;
You dreamed the dream that many an one allures,
The vernal dream where life is harmony.
And though the years estranged
Your full allegiance, something still assures
My heart you never changed.

V

What merriment was ours those shut-in nights
When Winter, clamorous at the casement, cried!
What dear association, what delights
As we in friendly emulation vied,
While Aspiration's cruse
Was brimmed for us, beholding on dim heights
The presence of the Muse!

VI

And then there opened wider paths to tread
When Love, with Song, beguiled you on and on,
While Art around your feet unfaltering shed
Its luminous light, irradiant as the dawn;
Though you saw many part
From deities long worshipped, you were wed
Inalienably to Art.

VII

What though the rigid chains of circumstance
Oft held you in the trammels of the town,
Your heart went woodward where the fairies dance
What time the moon its silvery sheen sifts down.
You loved the reeds and rills,
The sea, the shore, their glamour and romance,
And all the climbing hills.

VIII

And when you made escape, and sensed the wild
Aromas beat about you, when you fared
By tracks unwonted, like an unleashed child
You gleefully your gay abandon shared.
Care from your shoulders thrown,
You seemed an Ariel spirit, long exiled,
Come back unto its own.

IX

With gracious Memory again I go
To tread with you where meads are green and gold,
Where upland slopes are strewn with daisy-snow,
And bee-balm torches light the flocks to fold,
And willow branches wave
Above Oriskany, singing far below
Its liquid summer stave.

X

Now south we sail where stormy currents meet
Round the wind-harassed cape of Hatteras,
Beyond whose beacons, when the tides retreat,
The wide sea-mirror is like burnished glass;
There, 'mid the drowsy calms,
As Ponce de Leon did of yore, we greet
The tall Floridian palms.

XI

Here down the live-oak aisles 'tis ours to stray
With wraiths of many a stern conquistador,
Those vanished warriors of an elder day
When gray San Marco bore the brunt of war;
Here we in revery lean
Upon the ramparts beetling o'er the bay,
And watch the shifting scene;—

XII

The boats that dip and dart like living things,
Seeking the open sea beyond the bar;
The graceful gulls with sunlight on their wings
Up the Matanzas soaring fleet and far
Where inlets deep beguile;
And o'er the water's undulant shimmerings
The low coquina isle.

XIII

Then, at the drooping of the twilight hour,
We wander in the ancient plaza where
We breathe the attar of the jasmine flower
Like incense on the altar of the air;
And list, as music swells
Down drifting from the old cathedral tower,
The arpeggio of the bells.

XIV

We linger by the sea-wall while the tide
Below us murmurs like a sad refrain,
Bearing from outer ocean reaches wide
The lore and legend of the Spanish main,
Nor leave that spot serene
Till Sleep, as with the mantle of the bride,
Wraps fair Saint Augustine.

XV

Days dedicate to rapturous things were these;
It was as though Youth came again, and brought
Past aims, past ardors and past ecstasies,
And toward the shrine of Beauty turned our thought.
And there were after times
Of exultation, prismic harmonies,
When hours ran by in rhymes.

XVI

Once, 'mid cathedral Carolinian pines,
We saw the Springtide, at its radiant birth,
Kindle to fragrant gold the coiling vines,
And make a garden of the wakened earth;
And every morning heard
Within the treetops, melody linked with mirth,
The hidden mocking-bird.

XVII

And while the cardinal through the waving bredes
Of pendulous moss swift flitted like a flame,
Back flooded to our minds the illustrious deeds,
Emblazoned on the honor-scroll of Fame,
When Liberty was won,
Hearkening the Ashley whisper to its reeds
The name of Marion.

XVIII

From Gloucester cliffs and brown Nantucket dunes
The mountains lured you, and the mountain star;
For us the Woodland sang its lyric runes
Where'er we followed it, or near or far,
In sun or shadow cool,
Or loitered through long languorous afternoons
By Dian's darkling pool.

XIX

Far up the valley Wittenberg's vast form,
Its summit beckoning, with you I view,
And above sweeping slopes where wild bees swarm
Glimpse timid deer at dawn and fall of dew;
Through Panther Kill we roam,
And mark the purple streamers of the storm
Ascend behind the Dome.

XX

And, too, in bookmen's mines of dusty ore
Ever shall I remember how we delved,
Plucking from out the musty treasure-store
Rich rarities within the darkness shelved,
Elated if we found
Leaves that some name we long had honored bore
In frayed morocco bound.

XXI

Thus, step by step, we trod adown the years,
Thus, side by side, with ne'er a break between;
We shared our laughter and we shared our tears,
Nor deemed inexorable Fate might intervene
To sever the strong cord
That bound us, Fate with its "abhorrèd shears,"
That is man's over-lord.

XXII

You that in Autumn came, in Autumn went;
How vain to say the mourning word! how vain
To beat the bars of that arbitrament
That metes to mortals pleasurement or pain!
How vain!—how vain!—and yet
We beat upon them, and we only gain
The poignance of regret!

XXIII

Autumn again with all its loveliness;
Autumn again that brought an end to joy,
Despite the sight of earth in amber dress,
And airs that bear the blitheness of a boy!
Autumn, and leaves that toss
In bright brief triumphing, while they express
The brooding sense of loss.

XXIV

Autumn again down every winding way
That, in the days gone by, our footsteps pressed!—
Instead of woven amaranth would I lay
Above your dust—you gone by paths unguessed—
Love's deathless asphodel;
Until some happier hour,—when, who shall say?—
Brother in song, farewell!

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